

**Donna Harris Testimony on
House Bill 357**

For the record, my name is Donna Harris, I live in East Helena, and I have been a licensed vending facility operator in the Montana Business Enterprise Program since 2003. (I also served as vending operations manager for the program on a part-time basis.)

I am unable to attend the hearing today because my son is having surgery on his hands this afternoon and I felt I should be there.

I have prepared this statement because I want to urge you to vote for House Bill 357 because I am certain that its passage will significantly increase the number and quality of vending machine business opportunities for both existing and new blind vendors in the business enterprise program.

I own and manage a vending machine franchise – Sleeping Giant Vending – that consists of approximately 90 vending machines on 16 mostly state properties in Helena and the Deer Lodge Valley. I have worked very hard during the past four years to build up my business to the point that it is now consistently profitable and provides me with a decent income. This could not have been possible without the blind vendor program or the assistance provided by Blind and Low Vision Services and Montana Business Enterprises, Inc.

I believe strongly that if I can have this degree of success, other blind persons can too. HB 357 by providing access to selected Interstate Rest Areas will provide new, high-quality business opportunities for both current vendors and new ones. Without such opportunities, the blind vendor program cannot continue to grow and as a result will not realize its true potential -- which is to ultimately provide business opportunities to between 10 and 15 vendors and job opportunities for many more in support of the vendors.

I appreciate your consideration of my comments and hope you will give HB 357 and do-pass.

Thank you,

Donna Marks Harris
East Helena, MT